

Message Text

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15

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 SAB-01 SSM-03 OMB-01 AID-05 ACDA-05

IO-11 /096 W

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R 171500Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 221

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 1167

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI CABINET APPROVES NEW MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL

REF TEL AVIV 1084

BEGIN SUMMARY: CABINET, IN APPROVING APPOINTMENT OF HEBREW UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR SHLOMO AVINERI AS NEW MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL, HAS AFFIRMED THAT GOI POLICY ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE REMAINS UNCHANGED. ABSTENTION OF PERES, YAACOBI, AND BURG AND NEGATIVE VOTE OF NRP HARDLINER HAMMER, AS WELL AS VIGOROUS PUBLIC DEBATE OVER APPOINTMENT, INDICATE THAT MORE HAWKISH ISRAELI BELIEVE AVINERI APPOINTMENT MAY PRESAGE NEW PRESSURES FROM MODERATE CAMP FOR RECONSIDERATION OF ISRAELI PALESTINIAN POLICY. END SUMMARY.

1. ISRAELI CABINET FEBRUARY 15 APPROVED THE APPOINTMENT OF
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PROFESSOR SHLOMO AVINERI AS MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL EFFECTIVE

APRIL 1, 1976. SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER HAMMER (NRP) VOTED AGAINST THE APPOINTMENT WHILE PERES, YAACOB AND BURG ABSTAINED.

2. IN REBUTTING ARGUMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN RAISE BY LIKUD AND NRP CIRCLES IN OBJECTION TO APPOINTMENT OF AVINERI BECAUSE OF HIS "DOVISH" VIEWS, PARTICULARLY ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION, RABIN AND ALLON EMPHASIZED THAT GOI POLICY IS DETERMINED ON THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL AND NOT BY CIVIL SERVANTS. RABIN, ACCORDING TO THE CABINET COMMUNIQUE, STATED THAT THE AVINERI APPOINTMENT "PROVIDES NO INDICATION OF ANY CHANGE WHATSOEVER IN THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND/OR ITS DECISIONS ON ANY SUBJECT." ALLON REPORTEDLY CHARACTERIZED AVINERI DURING CABINET SESSION AS "THE RIGHT MAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE," AND CHALLENGED RIGHTWING CRITICS WHO HAD SAID THAT THE APPOINTMENT WAS "A STAB IN THE NATION'S BACK" TO COME OUT AND SAY PUBLICLY WHETHER THEY WERE REALLY REFERRING TO HIM (ALLON).

3. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, IN EXPLAINING HIS VOTE AGAINST AVINERI'S APPOINTMENT, SOCIAL WELFARE MINISTER HAMMER SAID THAT HE DID NOT TAKE EXCEPTION TO AVINERI'S QUALIFICATIONS. HE DOUBTED, HOWEVER, WHETHER AVINERI COULD ARGUE WITH ABSOLUTE CONVICTION, IN HIS CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN DIPLOMATS, THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, INCLUDING ITS CATEGORIC REJECTIONS OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE. HAMMER FURTHER REQUESTED THE CABINET TO DEFER FINAL DECISION ON THE AVINERI APPOINTMENT UNTIL AFTER ITS DEBATE ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE WHICH IS EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE SOON. (ONE PRESS REPORT HOLDS THAT ALLON IS PRESSING FOR CABINET DISCUSSION ON FEBRUARY 22, BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR LATIN AMERICA.) HAMMER ADDED, IN A POINTED MANNER, THAT AFTER THIS DEBATE HE MIGHT NO LONGER BE A MEMBER OF THE CABINET.

4. PERES ALSO RELATED HIS ABSTENTION TO AVINERI'S VIEWS ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. NOTING THAT AVINERI'S QUALIFICATIONS WERE IMPRESSIVE, PERES ADDED THAT THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER NOT TO PROCEED WITH HIS APPOINTMENT PRECISELY AT THIS MOMENT WHEN "SENSITIVE AND CRITICAL" PALESTINIAN

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ISSUE MAY REQUIRE NEW DECISIONS BY ISRAELI LEADERSHIP. BURG ALSO EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT A COOLING-OFF PERIOD WOULD HAVE BEEN ADVISABLE AFTER VINERI'S CONTROVERSIAL REMARKS ON ISRAELI RADIO ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE (REFTEL).

5. ACCORDING TO YEDIOT AHARONOT REPORT, EX-PRIME MINISTER MEIR TELEPHONED RABIN OVER WEEKEND TO EXPRESS HER OPPOSITION TO APPOINTMENT. ALTHOUGH ARTICLE DID NOT ENTER INTO REASONS

FOR HER REPORTED OPPOSITION, WE ASSUME THAT MEIR ALSO OBJECTS TO AVINERI'S VIEWS ON PALESTINIAN ISSUE.

6. BIO INFORMATION BEING POUCHED TO NEA/IAI.

7. COMMENT: AVINERI APPOINTMENT HAS PROVEN EXCELLENT LITMUS TEST AS TO WHERE ISRAELI POLITICIANS AND COMMENTATORS STAND ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, AND HAS UNDERLINED AGAIN ITS CONSIDERABLE CONROVERSIALITY. LIKUD/NRP POLITICIANS HAVE BEEN AT PAINS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THEIR ADMIRATION FOR AVINERI'S ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS AND THEIR OPPOSITION TO HIS "DOVISH" POLITICAL VIEWS. THE FACT THAT MINISTERS FELT IT NECESSARY TO SPELL OUT IN CABINET COMMUNIQUE THAT NO SUBMINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT CAN INDICATE A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY ITSELF INDICATES THE SENSE OF CONCERN HERE ABOUT THE FIRMNESS OF THE CURRENT APPROACH.
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